

The Manatee: Concerns and Considerations

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The West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) is an important consideration for almost every in-water and fringing wetlands development issue within the area of its range. Concerns regarding this species are every bit as diverse as the types of projects themselves. Most projects have the potential to directly and indirectly affect the manatee. And these effects range in severity from outright lethal takings to harassment. In addition, they generally involve some measure of habitat modification that may or may not have a significant effect on the manatee.

Development projects in manatee habitat typically involve watercraft. Watercraft may be used during project construction and they are usually the reason for the project; that is, many of these projects involve the construction of boat slips, boat ramps, and similar structures. Manatees are vulnerable to boat strikes, the leading cause of human-related manatee mortality. Vessel movements associated with project construction and subsequent use of these facilities by boats increase the likelihood of watercraft collisions. Other practices that affect manatees include activities such as blasting, dredging, sediment disposal, etc.

Prior to construction, recommendations are made to reduce project impacts on habitat. Manatee concerns during project construction are addressed by educating construction crews and by implementing watch programs. These measures include everything from watches conducted by construction crews to sophisticated watches involving aerial surveys, dedicated observers and specific conditions in which construction activities may take place. After construction, boat facilities are generally required to provide educational materials to facility users.

Manatee concerns are addressed during the Federal permitting process through the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Other concerns may be addressed through the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act. Federal action agencies involved in activities that may affect the manatee include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and others.

Development activities have affected the manatee and its habitat. Significant efforts are being made (and have been made) to minimize the sometimes adverse consequences of these actions on the species. Overall, we believe that these efforts are an important and successful means by which to reduce project-related impacts on manatees.